

The Challenge of Selecting Tomorrow's Police Officers from Generations X and Y

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Demands on police officers in the past 30 years have grown dramatically with the increasing threats to social order and personal security. Selection of police officers has always been difficult, but now with the increasing demand and complexity of police work, along with the candidates applying from Generation X and even Generation Y, the selection process has become more critical. The personal characteristics attributed to Generation X—and in the future, to Generation Y—should be factored into the selection process to ensure that those individuals selected as police officers will be able to cope with what has been described as the impossible mandate of police work in a free society. Background information on the X and Y generations is imperative for psychiatrists working with police departments and other law enforcement agencies. This article will explore these areas and construct a paradigm selection process.

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Policing is one of the noblest functions in society. In addition to crime-fighting, the police are expected to aid those who are sick, injured, lost, abused, mentally ill, or abandoned. In some earlier periods of history, police developed a negative image by associating themselves with oppressive governments. Today, police are generally regarded as semiautonomous institutions of social order—legalistic and utilitarian.¹

In the United States, the role of the police encompasses a variety of complex functions that are so intertwined that separation of these functions appears impossible. Such functions include crime fighting, peacekeeping, community service, and more important, maintaining order. Police work seems to be identified with problem solving—finding the truth. This is clearly a capacity that depends on knowledge, understanding, logic, judgment, initiative, and restraint, rather than on physical or technical ability.

Policing in a free society is not an easy task. The controversy between freedom and privacy on the one hand and social control and chaos on the other is probably one of the most difficult problems that face a civilized society. The heart of the problem is the government's operation of an effective and humane system of

control. There is a need for an effective but fair police system in what has been described as an impossible mandate—that of policing a free society.¹

Background

It should be noted that there are differences in the characteristics of individuals of a specific generation, depending on whether they were born early in the generation or at the end. Narrow and constricted stereotyping should not be used as weapons against any generation.

As the “baby boomers” (1943–1960) of law enforcement begin to gray and prepare for retirement, the “baby busters” of Generation X (1960–1980) are now being recruited into law enforcement work and are starting their ascent up the ladder of the law enforcement hierarchy. The term Generation X first appeared in 1960 in a paperback published in London, but Douglas Coupland, in 1991, first applied the phrase to a generation born in the 50s and early 60s in his novel, *Generation X*, and referred to the group's nonconformity to social mores and customs. It seemed natural, then, to refer to the next group as Generation Y. These generations are providing the prospective police officers waiting in the wings. Dates for the various generations can be and are ad-

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justed a few years in either direction by writers and researchers.

There are differences between the old (traditional) police officer and the new, based on the experiences of the individuals of the baby-boomer generation and those of Generations X and Y.

Police officers who were and are baby boomers were deeply affected by the aftermath of World War II, a time in which the United States and Russia had emerged as the major powers in the world. The Cold War, Korea, and, in particular, Vietnam further shaped the attitudes of the baby-boomer police officers. For the most part, they had been in the military and were used to discipline and the hierarchy of authority. They had a track record of coping with stress in the crucible of military training and service. Their military records were available to the various police departments that were evaluating them for employment in law enforcement. These officers fit readily into the paramilitary structure of the 17,000 police departments that make up the law enforcement community in the United States.

With the abolition of the draft, the increase in diversity in the population of the United States, the passage of affirmative-action laws, the advent of legalized birth control and abortion, the sky-rocketing use of drugs, an increase in civil disobedience, the breakdown of authority, the increase in divorces, and the breakdown of the family, there has been a change in the characteristics of the generation that followed the baby boomers.

Children of Generation X and Y have been exposed to modern liberalism, which stresses the dual forces of radical egalitarianism and radical individualism. A distinctive feature of modern liberalism is its unwillingness to deal with crime with the rigor it deserves and that the general public wants. The public wants much harsher treatment of violent criminals than liberals are willing to dispense in legislation, in court trials and sentencing, and in parole and probation procedures.²

The Generations

Each generation has its own peer personality, consisting of patterns of behavior and beliefs that are dominant among a group of people born during the same period. Shared cultural reference points include political happenings, economic conditions, and historical events. It is obvious that not everyone in a peer group would fall into the identical mode, attitude, or

personality type (e.g., not all baby boomers like rock and roll), but even those who are outside the norm would recognize the pattern as dominant. Each generation shares with its peers a common history, and living through that history has defined the world for them, so that the peer group may mutually understand who they are and where they fit.³

Describing the climate that Generation Xers were raised in:

... We are perhaps more than any previous generation, a product of the social trends of our times and of the times that immediately preceded us. The years in which we were born and raised—the 60s, 70s, and 80s—saw unprecedented changes in the political, social, and economic environment that, for the first time in American history, have made the future society's young members uncertain. In many cases, these troubling, sometimes appalling trends have since been scaled back or reversed, so that Americans born in the 60s and after may not face the same diachronic conditions. For the 75 million of us immediately in the baby boomer's wake, the uphill battle to overcome preexisting obstacles remains [Ref. 4, p 1].

In those individuals born between 1961 and 1981, the chances are greater that members of the peer group suffered some trauma while growing up as a result of the radical changes and events in this generation, which are reflected in their experiences involving crime, gangs, drugs, or all three. Baby boomers recall the Vietnam War, crime and riots in the streets, and the local school bully who made life miserable, but the threat to life was different, except for those individuals who were involved in the conflict in Vietnam. Generation X (in larger cities) has had the everyday reality of abortion, drug wars, drive-by shootings, robberies in grade school, kidnapped and missing children, and suicide that was not prevalent in earlier generations.³

Further complicating the Generation Xer's life is the experience of the conflicts, tensions, and frictions of the increasing diversity in the United States where Xers of all races were required by the legal reality to be integrated by busing, attend integrated classes, and learn of new codes of conduct in the diversified population. As a result, Generation Xers—whatever their race—have come to appreciate and experience the great differences between the ideal and the reality in racial relationships.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census anticipates a continual decline in the birth rate for all Americans. The birth rate of whites will continue to be dramatically lower than that of blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and others. As a result, the white population in America has

an older median age than other ethnic groups, and this age gap will continue to increase over the next 30 years.

By 2020, the median age for whites will be 42, ten years older than Blacks and twelve years older than Hispanics. As a result of all these factors, the white American of European descent, who was assumed to be the majority of the baby boomer generation, may well be a minority in generation X. . . . But in Generation X, everybody is a minority [Ref. 3, p 53].

It is projected that by the year 2020, non-Hispanic whites will comprise approximately 64 percent of the total population, down from 75 percent of all Americans today. Blacks who represent 12 percent of all Americans will comprise 13 percent of the population by 2020.³ These statistics are noteworthy as we consider the hiring of future police personnel.

Generation Xers are concerned about their long-term economic situation and are saving for retirement, because of their expectations that there will be no Social Security, health costs will increase, and pensions will be unstable. More than one-half of Generation Xers continue to live at home through their 20s. Many Generation Xers continue to depend on their parents for emotional, social, and even economic support. They marry later and may delay the birth of their children to increase their economic stability. Both parents expect to work and share in household tasks.³

Groups responsible for hiring must be aware of the problems facing these men and women. Finances and economics are problematic. Although psychiatrists can do little in these areas, they must be aware of the importance attached to these matters by potential police officers.

The women of Generation X place a greater importance on the home and family life they missed as children and are unwilling to compromise that for a job. They are less inclined to sacrifice their personal lives or families to the same level that baby-boomer women did. It has been observed that Generation X has no heroes and does not tend to idolize role models. They see the whole person with positive and negative attributes, tend to tear down ideals, and try to keep their world in perspective. Even though Generation Xers may be skeptical, they tend to be clear-sighted and intelligent. They are less idealists but are practical strategists and good negotiators. They have greater technological experience than any other generation.³

More than half of Generation Xers have divorced parents. More than half had working mothers. It was the first generation of latch-key kids. An overwhelming number (one-third) were physically or sexually abused, often by a stepparent. Many were neglected by parents who were in search of a career. It is a generation that has been or can be replaced by technology. This generation has witnessed tens of thousands of murders on television and in the movies. They have seen sex on television. They have seen corruption and corrupt leaders in religion, the government, and police departments. This generation is predicted to have a lower standard of living than their parents, with both spouses required to work to maintain lifestyles. Half of all marriages now end in divorce. One in four children is born to a single mother. The top three leading causes of death among Generation Xers are auto accidents, homicides, and suicides. They are strangers in their own land.⁵ They have witnessed unprecedented change in the political, social, and economic environment, and this has made them both anxious and uncertain.

In their jobs, Generation X has not experienced the concept of job security. As a result, Generation Xers tend to see jobs as a stepping-stone to something else. They may leave a job to seek greater satisfaction elsewhere. They may seem to lack loyalty and be overly concerned with their own security and survival. They value time away from work, and work to live rather than living to work. Their work effort may not match the expectations of their supervisors. They do not want to be managed and are not used to being closely supervised. Raised in an environment with less of an authoritarian attitude, they do not adapt as quickly to a paramilitary situation. They tend to expect immediate gratification and frequent job changes so they avoid becoming bored. They want feedback, but at the same time no supervision.⁶

In contrast, market analysts are predicting a value shift for Generation Y, those individuals born after 1980. Their dating, mating, and child-rearing habits may be more like those of their grandparents, rather than like the cast of *Melrose Place*.

One of the macro-trends we are seeing is neo-traditionalism. These kids are fed up with the superficialities of life. They have not had a lot of stability in their lives. It is a backlash; a return to tradition and ritual. And that includes marriage. It's all about finding the "right one" as opposed to sleeping around [Ref. 7, p 64].

There is a trend in this generation toward the return of family values. This generation is much more into the spirituality of love and more optimistic than Generation X. A surge in teen marriage and a trend toward bigger families is predicted.

There are other traits of Generation Y that represent a sharp break from Generation X. They have been the most supervised group in our history. Confident achievers, they are special and vital to our future. Generation Yers are team oriented, cooperative and interdependent and possess tighter peer bonds. Under extraordinary pressure to excel, they retain their parents' values and are conventional in thinking. There are few individual polls and surveys on Generation Y. More are needed.

In one study, 82 percent of the 20- to 24-year-olds thought motherhood was the most important job in the world, compared with 72 percent in the 25- to 34-year age group. There has been a definite swing toward traditional weddings. Women want their careers, but will not juggle careers, marriage, and personal lives. They intend to have their careers but want to work from home. Of those individuals involved romantically, 31.7 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds lived together in 1996. In just two years that number dropped to 21.6 percent.⁷ Looking for dates in bars has lessened, and a trend has developed toward finding love on-line, a growing phenomenon for Generation Y. The computer is becoming a living form of communication for this generation and is increasingly being used to find dates and mates.

Yet, at the same time there are disturbing trends in Generation Y. In a recent survey among this nation's high schools, 7 of 10 students admitted cheating on a test at least once in the past year, and nearly half had done so more often. Ninety-two percent of the 8,600 surveyed had lied to their parents in the past year; 78 percent said they had lied to a teacher and more than one in four said they would lie to get a job. Nearly one in six said that they had shown up for class drunk at least once in the past year.⁸ Large numbers of America's youngest adults between the ages of 18 and 24 are uneasy about the future of the country, feel alienated from their government, and do not believe that politicians listen to their viewpoint. They are significantly less optimistic. Forty-five percent were worried that America's best years may have passed.⁹

The two most important things that Generation Yers are looking for in a job are whether they are

going to have fun and whether they will have an opportunity to grow in their careers the way they want to. Further, they want competitive salaries, diversity in projects, good benefits, learning opportunities paid for by the company, travel opportunities, and flexible work hours.¹⁰ Only progressive police departments in the past have offered these opportunities. What is sought is not always attainable, but psychiatrists should be aware of the possibilities as well as the reality of the situation as it stands.

Work Attitudes

The Silent Generation, the mature workers born between 1930 and 1948 are generally loyal, security conscious, and conformists. Having lived through the Depression they consider themselves survivors. Many have served in the military and strongly believe in the American way. Many are currently retired or are quickly approaching retirement. Research shows that this generation will work past retirement if given more flexible arrangements and part-time hours.¹¹

The baby boomers grew up in a time of rising prosperity and now form most of the senior and middle management of organizations. Self-reliant, this group truly believes their causes are more important than other's causes. They volunteer more than any other group. Gender roles for this group have been blurred as women move into challenging careers and men share parenting and household tasks and roles. They are the first generation to view old age positively.¹² This was the "me" generation, and their god is money. They believe that they deserve success and like frequent challenges and opportunities to make themselves successful. There are three key elements to consider in structuring job packages for this generation because of the strong economic period that molded them, the goals they set for themselves, and the degree to which they focused on themselves.

The first element is retirement planning. This generation is becoming more concerned about the financial future. Assistance with retirement and personal planning is highly valuable to this group. Opportunities for gradual or early retirement plans are of great interest to them.

The second element is the need for keeping up with emerging technologies and the opportunity to continue improving their skills and knowledge. Their greatest fear is getting displaced from the fast-changing world they helped create. The third ele-

ment is life balance. Their main focus has been work. They now want to spend more time with their families and want flexible working opportunities, longer vacation time, and brief career breaks. Police departments should be offering—or at least considering—assistance in these elements.

Generation Xers comprise 16 percent of the population. They are sometimes called the invisible generation. The god for this generation is pleasure. They are independent, driven self-starters, and authority resistant. This generation grew up with parents whose primary focus was work and money, and the Xers did not like it. Consequently, they want balance in their lives, worthwhile challenging work, and fun and excitement. Organizations that can supply these will be the most successful in attracting and retaining key people.

Mention should be made of some of the false perceptions of Generation Xers. Underlying their restlessness is their unique ability to adapt to change, and they are eager to make lasting contributions to institutions that welcome their investment. They do not have short attention spans; rather they are voracious learners digesting massive amounts of information at a fast pace. Generation Xers are not arrogant or insolent. When managed properly they are willing to go the extra mile and beyond if necessary. When given autonomy, they are determined to innovate and succeed. They are impatient for rewards and indications that hard work is being appreciated.¹³ Because of their lack of parental supervision, they are a self-managing, telecommuting, flex time-working, sabbatical-taking, and job-sharing generation that does not like to be pushed around. The more management is able to maintain a hands-off style, the better it will be able to keep this generation of workers.

Generation Xers desire more feedback, good and bad—preferably good. They want opportunities to develop in the management structure, and they are certain that their opinions are as useful as those of managers at the top. They do not want to be confined to “their level” in an organization. Opportunities for training and development of skills and experiences to increase their own marketability are necessary to keep this generation of limited loyalty. Generation Xers also want their rewards now, and do not want to be short changed. Surveys indicate that Generation Xers are less politically engaged, exhibit

less trust in government, and have a weaker allegiance to the country or any political party.

Generation Y has been around only for a short time and manifests some of the value systems of Generation X. The literature on this generation is sparse. It is going to be necessary to become attuned to the changing needs of Generation Y in time to determine what their ultimate motivation is and how best to adapt to it.

Attitudes of Generation X and Y Toward Police Work and Law Enforcement

The rate of violent crime has gone down in the nation as a whole. This is simply the lull before the storm. Police work continues to be needed for maintenance of order—even more so in modern society because of the country's diversity. This will lead to an increase in problems. The criminal of the future will be different from the criminal in the past generation—more violent—beginning in 2005, when there will be more teens and young adults in that age bracket. The population of young males in the age group that commit violent crime is about to increase rapidly and is expected to produce more violence than we have at present.

In past generations before Generation X, the average members of the work force were white males, approximately 29 years old, and married with children; they had fewer than 12 years of education. Most lived in the region in which they were born.¹⁴ There was a high degree of similarity and a less liberal society that led to commonly held conservative beliefs and values. But changes have occurred. The population and work force are more diversified, with more women and minorities. There is an increasing gap between those highly educated and those who have a minimal education and the ability to read or write effectively.

Federal, local, and state governments have had to struggle to overcome society's emphasis on careers in the private sector over those in public service. The law enforcement community will need personnel who are highly professional and prepared to continue upgrading their skills.¹⁵

To help determine what will be needed to recruit this type of person in law enforcement, a survey was conducted in a group of 71 criminology students at Florida State University.¹⁶ Although the sample was

small, the responses were indicative of attitudes. Additional surveys and polls are needed to augment these findings.

The average age of those responding was 21.2, with 58.6 percent male, 37.9 percent female, 69.9 percent non-Hispanic white, 16.0 percent African American, 9.1 percent Hispanic, and 2.2 percent other. The survey included 35 questions involving law enforcement. There were three disturbing areas of response, related to off-duty lifestyle, honesty, and use of controlled substances. Of the respondents, 28.6 percent believed that off-duty personal life styles should have no impact on their professional law enforcement careers; 28.6 percent believed that a person with a felony arrest record could still make a good law enforcement officer; and 18.3 percent believed that there are times when it is acceptable for a police officer to lie to arrest a criminal who the officer believes committed a heinous crime. Other areas of concern were that 30.9 percent of respondents would not leave a party if people they knew were using marijuana; 7.9 percent would not leave a party if cocaine was being used; 19.4 percent believed that the end justifies the means when enforcing the law; and 41.3 percent did not believe that the general public opinion of law enforcement is positive.¹⁵

On the positive side, 95.3 percent of respondents believed that individual character, honesty, and integrity are the most important values that a law enforcement officer can possess; 73.4 percent expected law enforcement officers to hold their personal lives to a higher standard than is expected of the average person in our society; 92.8 percent believed that members of a law enforcement agency should be loyal to its policies and use lawful, morally correct methods; 93 percent believed that law enforcement is a profession; 93 percent would consider the professional reputation of a particular law enforcement agency for potential employment; 91.9 percent believed that retirement benefits are important when choosing a specific agency for a career; 84.9 believed that a tuition reimbursement program for continuing education is important for choosing a specific agency for a career; and 93 percent believed that the salary range is critical for choosing a law enforcement agency.¹⁵ These areas should be considered when evaluating and recruiting a prospective police officer for employment.

Violence and Generations X and Y

Police officers in the future will be dealing primarily with criminals who are of Generations X and Y, and yet they will also have been exposed to the same factors and similar cultural experiences as the felons. Individuals of the X and Y generations, when they have reached 18 years of age, will already have seen 200,000 dramatized acts of violence and 40,000 dramatized murders on television and in the movies.¹⁷

As their exposure to violence grows, there consequently will be, in vulnerable children, a “taste” for it. Half of the video games that a typical seventh grader plays are violent. The boundary line between fantasy and reality violence becomes blurred for vulnerable children. Children preoccupied with the culture of violence become desensitized to it and more capable of committing violence themselves. School massacres have been the result from Jonesboro, Arkansas, to Littleton, Colorado, to Paducah, Kentucky.¹⁷

Although there has been little research into the impact of violent interactive entertainment on young people, preliminary studies indicate that the negative effect may be significantly more severe than that resulting from television, movies, or music. Children who see a lot of violence are more likely to view violence as an effective way of settling conflict and are more likely to assume that acts of violence are acceptable behavior. Viewing violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life. It can decrease the likelihood that one will take action on behalf of a victim when violence occurs. Violence in entertainment feeds a perception that the world is a violent and mean place. Viewing violence increases fear of becoming a victim of violence, with a resultant increase in self-protective behavior and a mistrust of others. Viewing violence may lead to real-life violence. Children exposed to violent programming at a young age have a higher tendency toward violent and aggressive behavior later in life than children who are not so exposed.¹⁸

Children of this generation have been sexually abused—one of three girls and one of seven boys—by the age of 18. Among young people 15 to 27 years old, murder is the second leading cause of death. In African-Americans in this age group, murder is the number one cause of death. Every five minutes a child is arrested in the United States for committing a violent crime, and related violence

takes the life of an American child every three hours. A law enforcement survey estimates that there are at least 4,881 gangs in the United States with approximately 250,000 members. A child growing up in Washington, D.C., or Chicago is 15 times more likely to be murdered than a child in Northern Ireland. Since 1960, teen suicide has tripled. Every day an estimated 270,000 students bring guns to school. One of every 50 children has a parent in prison.¹⁷

Dr. Levin, a professor at Wheelock College in Boston, summed it up: "Not only are children hurting each other in ways that young children never did before, but they are learning every day that violence is the preferred method of settling disputes" (Ref. 17, p 21). There is a rage and anger on the playgrounds now that was not there a few years ago, and children are apparently settling their differences in more violent ways.

The change in children and their consequent violence is attributable in part to the home situation, television and other media, and video games. The graphic violent imagery on television, the movies, and video arcades are simulating murder and permit children to minimize the actual experience of killing with resultant desensitization to violence and killing.¹⁷

One Generation Y 14-year-old, without any prior handgun experience, hit eight of eight persons at a student prayer meeting, five with head shots and three with upper torso shots. This boy had practiced by "killing" literally thousands of people using point-and-shoot video game simulations. With hundreds of hours of practice, in video arcades and their own homes, media-guided violence predisposes children to see killing as acceptable.¹⁷

It is possible, however, for violence in the media to be an influence for good:

If the consequences of violence are demonstrated, if violence is shown to be regretted or punished, if the perpetrators are not glamorized, if the act of violence is not seen as justifiable, if in general violence is shown in a negative light as causing human suffering and pain then the portrayal of violence is less likely to create imitation effects. But if the violence is glamorized, sanitized and made to seem routine or even fun to do, then the message is that it is acceptable and our children imitate it [Ref. 17, p 26].

In the many studies that have been conducted over the past four decades, experts have found three basic negative effects from exposure to screen violence: increased aggression, fear, and insensitivity to real life. The studies repeatedly demonstrated that more

physical violence is seen in children and youth who watch screen violence and/or play violent video games. The average American watches four hours of television each day through the most formative years until age 18. Hundreds of studies of the effect of television violence on children and teenagers have found that children may become "immune to the horror of violence, gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems, imitate the violence that they observe on TV, and identify with certain characters, victims, and/or victimizers" (Ref. 17, p 128). Prospective police officers have been exposed to these same influences, and consequently their handling of and coping with anger should be evaluated when they applying for positions as police officers.

Affirmative-Action Police Officers

Police officers have been categorized into traditional police officers, including minority police officers and affirmative-action police officers. The police officers hired under the auspices of affirmative action came onto the various police departments after the enactment of affirmative-action policies during 1978 and 1979. These police officers are not inclined to socialize with other officers off duty and do not seem to care about their fellow police officers. They have been described as abusing the system and as having a lack of competence and a general lack of civility. They are seen as having no sense of camaraderie, leading to a fragmentation of the departments. Before affirmative action, being a police officer was the tie that bound all officers as a group. Today, this has been replaced by special-interest subgroups and by the time of entrance into and number of years served in the department. The key difference has been a lack of community among police officers. Minority officers hired before court-mandated minority hiring are considered to be more competent than the majority of the new officers—minority or otherwise—who have been hired since qualifications and service training standards have been relaxed.¹⁹

Observation from the Ranks

A retired police officer from the baby-boomer generation, an assistant chief for more than 10 years, reported his observations on dealing with police officers from Generation X. He found them to have different priorities and a tendency to reject authority. They did not seem willing to make the same sacrifices

as those of the older generation. They lacked sound personal fiscal management and a sense of discipline. Morale was low. Managing the Generation X police officer presented many unique challenges. Not only were these officers seen as a different breed, they faced many different types of stress, legal liability, and issues generated by new laws, public perception, and political agendas. Some by-the-book methods are still viable, he said, but there is a need to understand the values and perception of this generation. The retired police chief acknowledged that some management techniques should be changed.

Army Generation Gap

Difficulties associated with recruiting and retaining police officers from Generations X and Y have parallels with other professions in both the public and private sector. One of these groups is the United States Army.

A new Army study²⁰ concludes that captains are leaving the service in large numbers, mainly because of a generation gap between baby-boomer generals and junior officers of Generation X. After the Gulf War, downsizing took place. The army was weakened and needed refining.

Individuals of Generation X have great confidence in their abilities to succeed in the army as well as the civilian world. Many Generation Xers who hold technical and entrepreneurial skills in the service enter the private sector in high-ranking positions. Well informed on issues, they believe that authority is to be earned and is not automatic because of a person's position. In college they were taught to think critically and challenge the status quo. They continue to do so.

Senior officers can mistake their self-reliance and confidence for arrogance. Baby boomers dominate nearly all the upper leadership positions. Conventional fixes no longer retain the junior officers. Senior officers are accused of being out of touch with reality, and it is said that they "just don't get it." Even though well-meaning policies have been made by senior officers, many of these have only increased the gap between the two generations.

The Army's study and evaluation contains recommendations worth noting, since military service and police departments have much in common:

- Allow junior officers to have more balance in their life and work.

- Examine financial packages and retirement benefits.

- Give adequate compensation. Pay is important but money alone won't hold them.

- Reduce, if possible, dependence on rank and position.

- Provide time to nurture family relationships.

- Include junior officers in the decision making process.

- Be technologically relevant.

- Remember that the army is a noble profession, but it is not the one thing that determines or distinguishes the individual. An individual is defined by family, life, personal ties and army life (Ref. 20, pp 13-24).

Recruitment, Selection, and Retention

The problem of selection of qualified police officers from Generations X and Y is not unique to the United States. Other countries also have problems with inadequate screening and psychological stress. In the latter, the stress to which a police officer is exposed is extraordinary, including serious threats to themselves, their lives, and physical integrity and/or serious threats to their fellow officers. They witness riots and corruption, the serious injury or deaths of citizens, bombings, and critical incidents that involve their being shot at and shooting at someone. They deal daily with the hostility and resistance of citizens.²¹ Some natural or accidental disasters that police officers are exposed to produce occasional stress, and others produce frequent stress. These stresses contribute to a loss of the sense of immortality; all individuals come to realize they are mortal, but the realization occurs in police offices at a much younger age. Stress, when it is prolonged or overwhelming and the individual is not able to cope, becomes harmful physically and psychologically. The interplay between the stress of police work, the type of police department (suburban, large city, sheriff's department), the social support system, the individual's personality structure, experience, neurobiological substrate, psychological strength, and maturity determine the outcome. "On exposure to stress, the adaptive capacities of the police officer who is genetically, neurologically, physically, intellectually, morally, or socially impaired are exhausted more readily

than the capacities of one who is less disadvantaged” (Ref. 21, p 236). Individuals react differently to stress depending on their psychological resilience. An individual who is psychologically impaired before becoming a police officer tends to have his or her basic personality problems accentuated when under stress, with resultant deterioration in functioning.

Preferably, police candidates should be graduates of a four-year college, in view of the complexity of police work. The best predictor of an individual's future behavior is his or her past behavior. The ideal standard is the absence of a history of deviant behavior and absence of alcohol and drug abuse.²² The history of substance abuse, the relationship to authority, respect for the law, job history, and financial records are extremely important in the evaluation of prospective police officers. In addition, the way individuals handle their anger must be carefully assessed. The family history is important to determine the possible identification and dynamics in an individual. Family history of psychological disturbance or criminal activity and interpersonal relationships should be explored. Relationships with friends and interactions should be evaluated. Reasons why a person desires to be a police officer should be appraised.

Psychiatric evaluations should be performed with the realization that candidates are putting their best foot forward. All evaluators should be knowledgeable about law enforcement work and the demand it makes on a person.

Law enforcement has progressed from a job that required little formal education to a profession. In this information era in which we live, police officers must be well educated to cope with the challenge of police work involving sophisticated equipment and mobile data terminals, which require formal training to operate.

In prospective police officers, there should be respect for authority and an ability to get along with colleagues, in a world where police officers rely on one another. There must be an understanding of rank and of the flow of the chain of command.¹⁹ A commanding presence is another attribute that is necessary in prospective officers—the ability and quality that convey supreme authority, confidence, and competence, with the physical ability to back it up. Essentially, it is an exercise in the presentation of self.

The ideal is to be able to “select-in” desirable individuals as opposed to “selecting-out” undesirable

candidates. Aspirants should be intelligent and flexible, with communication skills and interpersonal competence. They should have the initiative and judgment to do a difficult and dangerous job effectively. There is not one specific type of person who is desirable, but rather individuals with various skills and other abilities that are demanded by the complexity of the changing law enforcement roles and services needed by citizens. Hiring this type of person requires that there be an adequate salary to make the profession of police work competitive with other jobs that prospective officers could obtain.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) imposes an “absolute duty to administer exams to job applicants” so that they reflect actual ability to do the job for which they have applied.²³ Preselection examinations are permitted that ask applicants to demonstrate how they will be able to perform job-related functions. Role-playing consequently becomes important in the evaluation of prospective police officers.

Each type of community has a different viewpoint of what is required from the police department. Sophisticated communities want professional, educated, and sensitive officers who can relate to the community. Areas with a high crime rate want a police officer who can deal effectively with the criminal element. Some communities want police officers who can understand the various issues of a diverse multicultural community. A police chief should be able to assess community and departmental needs to determine what type of police officers are needed in the future.²⁴ Police chiefs must be aggressive in their recruitment of the types of officers needed in their departments. Their departments should offer opportunities for special education and learning, opportunities to go to school and universities for an advanced degree, and recognition of accomplishments of the police officer in further education.

The selection process from a pool of candidates with a clearly defined job description should be limited to the absolutely best candidate for further evaluation. Only the best-qualified, educated, dedicated, moral, and ethical person should be selected. A polygraph should be used to evaluate the background information obtained. Problem candidates should be weeded out before they are hired and become a problem, due to negligent hiring, negligent retention, or ineffective supervision. Civil service commissions

must be aware of the problems involved in police officer recruitment and selection.²⁴

Law enforcement agencies must become a learning organization in which individuals become active participants in expanding their knowledge in an atmosphere in which people discuss and explore concepts. Departments that foster the attitudes that “thinking stops doing” and “yours is not to reason why; yours is but to do and die” send a message to recruits and police officers that one must “go along to get along,” which is the antithesis of the community-policing program.²⁵

Police officers now are much less inclined to accept the status quo and are more inclined to be militant and to band together to achieve their goals and ends. Associations representing the interests of police officers are starting to work together. As a result, there will be more organized resistance to administrations that are not progressive and able to carry on a dialogue with their police officers, with resultant division and direct attacks on administrations. In addition, police officers who are unhappy will be voting with their feet in lateral transfers to other departments rather than resolving ongoing disputes with administration. One reservoir of traditional police officers is children of the families of current traditional police officers, where the prospective police officer would be aware of the demands of police work. In these instances, it is necessary to evaluate fully the attitude of this type of candidate for any possible antiauthoritarian attitude or any unethical family attitudes and beliefs about police work.

The job description and announcements are critical elements in the recruitment and selection process. The job description should include the need to work rotating shifts, nights, and weekends; 24-hour availability; mandatory overtime; uniform and grooming requirements; adherence to police department rules; and regulations and mandatory physical wellness.²⁴ Job descriptions should include the possible need in critical situations to kill a fellow human being and the possibility of being involved in physical confrontations with citizens. A primary concern in the evaluation is how officers cope with their own anger and aggression in view of their experiences as part of Generations X and Y.

Police officers in the future will continue to be involved in community policing (more proactive),

along with the professional model of policing (incident-oriented policy) or team policy (reactive).²⁶ Making valid employment decisions is critical for law enforcement agencies. One way that has been used is the roundtable hiring process, in which a group from the agency formalizes and standardizes the hiring process in difficult situations while decreasing agency exposure to potential litigation. The final decision on hiring is made based on all available data.²⁷

Community policing is beginning to dominate the way police deal with crime. The concept of community policing stresses empowerment at the lowest levels of the organization. Police management can be threatened in community policing by the loss of power and status that took them years to attain. In community policing, organizational leaders, in dealing with subordinates, should reject the coercive leadership style and promote total quality management, which stresses listening to others and coaching and fostering the personal development of employees. Traditional police officers would say that “this won’t happen in my lifetime” and that it would occur only when the traditional police officers are gone. Leaders must involve all members of the organization in the development of the values statement of the program. Involvement on the part of the members of the organization creates commitment.²⁶ “. . . [O]ne of the most important leadership tools—the organization’s mission and values (guiding principles)—can be used to develop credibility in the marketplace that will enhance recruiting efforts and develop professional pride that will encourage employee retention” (Ref. 28, p 2). Marketing strategies can be used to project a positive image of law enforcement.

Empowerment allows officers an opportunity to develop personal skills as an active member of the organization. Officers can be given diverse assignments as a means of retaining their interest.²⁶ However, even in community policing, police officers must have respect for rank, comprehension of the chain of command, the ability to follow orders, and a commitment to the department and their fellow officers. Anything less endangers the safety and well-being of themselves and their fellow police officers. The selection process of police officers becomes one of the most important factors influencing a police department. A proposed solution in some states is the lowering of standards. Instead, agencies should try to raise job satisfaction and professionalism.

Conclusions

Selection of police officers has become a difficult, complex, and many-faceted process that involves dealing with the changing personality characteristics of police officers from Generations X and Y. Knowledge of the characteristics of the generations by those involved in the hiring process (e.g., police chiefs, civil service commissioners, psychiatrists) will diminish the possibility of negligent hiring, reduce problems with citizens that are anticipated in the coming years, and result in greater opportunities for better training and retention of police officers.

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